

Editorial

The Leopard Cannot Change its Spots

Prior to the inauguration of Barack Obama as the new president of the United States, there were a lot of expectations that he would set a new tone for American foreign policy. These expectations persisted despite the fact that in his campaign speeches Obama pledged to continue most of the foreign policies of the Bush administration.

Obama's supporters and those who chose to create illusions about his presidency excused these pledges on the basis that Obama needed to say such things in order to get elected, but once elected he would pursue a different foreign policy. In particular, there have been many suggestions that Obama would change the American attitude towards the Israel-Palestine conflict. During the three weeks of Israeli

bombardment of the people of Gaza, Obama remained silent, claiming that there could only be one president at a time.

On his first day in office, Obama's promises to close the Guantanamo detainment facility within a year and to order the military and CIA to stop torturing prisoners have been hailed as signifying a new era in U.S. foreign policy. However, the U.S. was already a signatory to numerous international covenants prohibiting torture and that has never stopped it from training, organizing and supervising torture and death squads throughout the world - Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Iran, Indonesia, etc. Furthermore, by focusing on only the issue of

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Five Conservative MPs Under Investigation for Interference in Wheat Board Elections

The RCMP confirmed this month that it is investigating a complaint filed by the National Farmers' Union against five Conservative MPs for violating the rules governing elections to the Canadian Wheat Board's board of directors. The CWB board is comprised of 10 elected farmers, who serve four-year-terms, and five government appointees. Elections are held every two years in five of the voting districts.

The five government MPs - four in Saskatchewan and one in Alberta - mailed out letters in three of the five electoral districts urging voters to support candidates in favour of getting rid of the CWB system of collective marketing.

One of the MPs being investigated, David Anderson, is also the Parliamentary Secretary for the CWB. The letters were mailed out in late November (the elections ended the first week of December) on House of Commons letterhead and were funded by each MP's constituency budget. The Speaker of the House of Commons has already ruled that mailing out these letters was not an abuse of parliamentary privilege, although opposition MPs pointed out it was akin to MPs mailing letters to their constituents instructing them how to vote in civic or community organization elections. The letter sent by David

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torture, which has seriously tarnished the image of the U.S. in international public opinion, Obama is covering up the more fundamental crime of U.S. imperialism – the invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq and the ongoing slaughter of civilians in those countries. Neither in his campaign speeches, his acceptance speech, nor in his inauguration address has Obama once referred to the equality of nations. Rather, he has repeatedly called for the restoration of the pre-eminent position of the U.S. in international affairs. He never speaks about respecting the sovereignty and independence of other countries and peoples, but rather about spreading American “freedom and democracy” around the world. American “freedom and democracy” has become synonymous with war and aggression, with support for fascist dictatorships, and the use of terrorism, torture, assassinations and “disappearances” to crush any opposition to U.S. control. So Obama’s pledge to end the practice of torture at the same time that he pledges to strengthen U.S. imperialism rings somewhat hollow indeed.

On his third day in office Obama addressed State Department employees along with Vice-President Joseph Biden and Secretary of State Hilary Clinton. In that meeting, for the first time since the U.S. election Obama addressed the issue of Israel. He stated:

“Let me be clear: America is committed to Israel’s security. And we will always support Israel’s right to defend itself against legitimate threats. For years, Hamas has launched thousands of rockets at innocent Israeli citizens. No democracy can tolerate such danger to its people, nor should the international community, and neither should the Palestinian people themselves, whose interests are only set back by acts of terror. To be a genuine party to peace, the quartet has made it clear that Hamas must meet clear conditions: recognize Israel’s right to exist; renounce violence; and abide by past agreements.”

Obama made no mention of the necessity for Israel to recognize the right of the Palestinian people to exist, to renounce violence and to abide by the numerous UN resolutions demanding that it withdraw from the West Bank and Gaza. Obama thus made it crystal clear that there will be no change in U.S. policy towards the Israel-Palestine conflict. In other words, the message of “hope” for the world’s people delivered in his inaugural address on January 20 clearly does not extend to the Palestinian people.

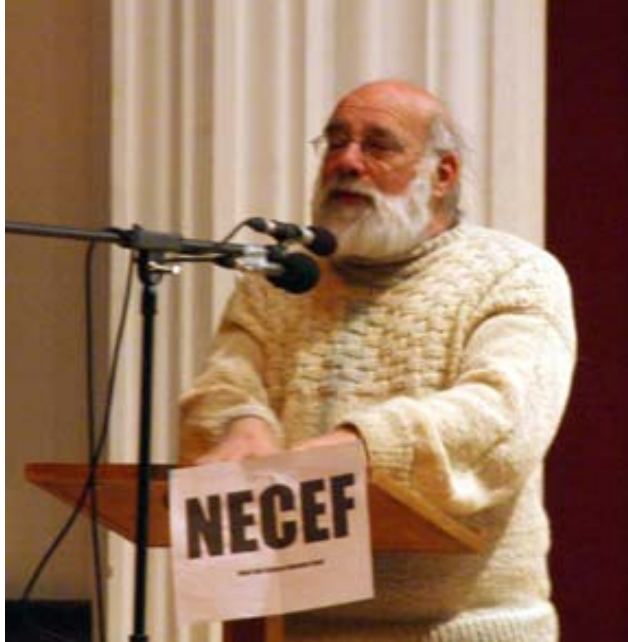
Obama went on to outline the conditions his regime will impose on the Palestinian people if they want food and medicine to reach them:

“I was deeply concerned by the loss of Palestinian and Israeli life in recent days and by the substantial suffering and humanitarian needs in Gaza. Our hearts go out to Palestinian civilians who are in need of immediate food, clean water, and basic medical care, and who’ve faced suffocating poverty for far too long. Now we must extend a hand of opportunity to those who seek peace. As part of a lasting cease-fire, Gaza’s border crossings should be open to allow the flow of aid and commerce, with an appropriate monitoring regime, with the international and Palestinian Authority participating. Relief efforts must be able to reach innocent Palestinians who depend on them. The United States will fully support an international donor’s conference to seek short-term humanitarian assistance and long-term reconstruction for the Palestinian economy. This assistance will be provided to and guided by the Palestinian Authority.”

This means that the condition for a “cease-fire” for the people of Gaza is their acceptance of continuing control of their borders by Israel and control of international aid and reconstruction of the economy by the corrupt and bankrupt Palestinian Authority (PA). The people of Gaza have repeatedly rejected this blackmail. They have expressed, through democratic elections, their desire to be represented by Hamas and that Hamas be in control of aid

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Hundreds Attend Jeff Halper Events in Winnipeg



Jeff Halper speaking at the Canadian Mennonite University on January 25. Above right, photo of packed auditorium at Canadian Mennonite University.

Several hundred people took part in events organized throughout Winnipeg from January 24-26 to hear Israeli peace activist Jeff Halper discuss the current Gaza crisis and the apartheid conditions facing Palestinians living in the occupied territories and within Israel.

Halper, who is a founding member of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD), spoke to over 120 peace activists on January 24, and to a packed auditorium at the Canadian Mennonite University on January 25. On January 26, he spoke to students at CMU, the University of Winnipeg and the University of Manitoba.

Halper stressed repeatedly that the assault on Gaza, combined with the siege Israel imposed following its “withdrawal” in August 2005, have created a humanitarian disaster.

He also noted that the Israeli military escalation has nothing to do with security and everything to do with further humiliating the Palestinian people.

Discussing the similarities between Israel’s policies towards the Palestinians and South Africa apartheid-era policies, he concluded the main difference was that many Israeli policies were “far worse.”

“Israelis already use ‘hafrada’, the Hebrew word for ‘separate’, (which is what apartheid means in Afrikaans), to describe these policies. The reality is that within Israel there is no controversy over whether or not this is apartheid. It is the reality. Even the wall we are building is called not a security wall but a separation wall.”

Using maps to illustrate his point, Halper pointed out that the Israeli goal over the last two decades has been to isolate the Palestinians into small, Bantustan-like regions, cut off from other Palestinian villages by an extensive network of Israeli settlements. The entire effort has been undertaken to ensure that there is no possibility of a viable Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem.

For Palestinians to travel in and out of these isolated communities, he noted, they had to pass through part of what he described as Israel’s “matrix of control” – the hated checkpoints. “These are the scenes of countless humiliations,” he said, noting it is routine for IDF soldiers to deny the elderly and sick trying to access medical appointments through the checkpoints.

The “matrix of control” is so much more sophisticated in Israel than it was in South Africa, Halper noted, that police forces from around the world are trained by Israel in “warehousing” populations successfully.

“This is not just a regional issue,” he noted. “The techniques they have used to imprison over one and a half million people in Gaza are being exported around the world.”

This was Halper’s second visit to Winnipeg, and was jointly organized by a number of organizations.

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distribution and economic development. Far from shaking that determination, Israel's three weeks of brutal bombardment and slaughter of Gazans has further undermined support for Fatah and the PA, not only in Gaza, but in the West Bank as well.

So, within three days of taking office, Obama has succeeded in shattering the hopes and dreams of the hundreds of millions of people around the world who fervently believed that a president whose skin colour is the same as that of so many of the oppressed peoples of the world would sympathize with the

oppressed against the oppressors. However, Obama was not elected as the champion of the oppressed people of the world, but as the champion of U.S. imperialism, the greatest oppressor of the peoples in history. He is no more capable of changing the nature of U.S. imperialism than a leopard is of changing its spots. Freedom for the Palestinian people can only be won through their own struggles and those of the world's people against imperialism and all forms of reaction; it will never be handed to them by those who are responsible for their enslavement and oppression.

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Anderson, for example, states "I am very pleased to have a strong proponent for marketing choice running right here in District 4. Sam Magnus ... has a proven record in mediation and was seen as instrumental in brokering the merger between the Canadian Alliance and the Progressive Conservative parties. ... Together, we can bring marketing choice to Western Canada. Time is running out, vote for Sam ..."

The NFU has asked the RCMP to investigate whether the five MPs got access to the CWB voter lists, which are provided only to the candidates in each district for use during the election period and then must be returned or destroyed.

Some of the MPs, including David Anderson, have claimed that they didn't use the official voter list but rather used lists they had pulled together in their own constituencies over the years. However, as Saskatchewan farm columnist Paul Beingessner (himself a pro-collective marketing candidate in District 8) pointed out, this claim borders on the absurd:

"Thus, the mystery. Where did Dave get a list of names that so exactly matches the names on the confidential voters list? Well, says Dave, I have a lot of lists. I've been collecting lists for twenty years.

"And what remarkable lists they must be. Lists of farmers. Lists of their wives. Lists of farm companies. Lists even of numbered companies, just as they appear on the voters list. (Companies can have

permit books, and hence are entitled to a ballot in director elections.)

"Nor are Dave's lists in any way stale. With a prescience bordering on clairvoyance, David Anderson has lists of names that are found nowhere else but on the voters list. Names of companies, for example, that have only existed for a few months. Names of farmers that are used nowhere else but in permit books. Dave has remarkable lists, but he doesn't have the voters list." (Of Lying and List Making, Dec. 1, 2008)

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